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Inventory for
Manuscript Collection
MS-243

Capt. Francis Rittal Papers

Inclusive dates: 1794-1824
Bulk dates: 1794-1819

by
Anastasia S. Weigle
September 2012

Shelf feet: .25 linear feet
Number of boxes: 1
Accession 76.79.03-04

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Abstract

Rittal, Francis, (b. 1764-d.1824), *Captain*

Papers, 1794-1824 (Bulk dates:1794-1819)

1 Manuscript size box, (.25 Shelf feet)

Eighteenth-century American shipmaster from West Dresden, Maine

Personal papers of Captain Francis Rittal. Includes an account book dated 1794-1824 illustrating the personal records of certain ship's financial matters, in particular the schooners *Sally, Camillus* and *Amanda Malvina* and for ships *Eleonora, Union* and *United States*. Various accounts include dividends to shareholders, accounts for repair, disbursements, freight accounts and portage bills. A navigation book dated 1805 is also part of this collection and includes 16 leaves of brightly colored and minutely-detailed drawings, mostly illustrating problems in geometry and navigation.

Donated by Carrie L. Groves (Reed) and Gladys R. Castner (Reed).

MS-243, Accession No. 76.87.03-04.

Related materials, artifacts: Portrait of Capt. Francis Rittal (acc.#7 8.010), Wood and brass telescope (acc. #76.079.2), watercolor painting of the ship *Lady Washington* (acc. #76.079.1)

Finding aid available in repository; item level control.

Added entries—persons:

Rittal, Francis, *Captain*

Added entries—places:

Dresden (ME)

Wiscasset (ME)

Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels):

Amanda Malvina (Schooner)

Camillus (Schooner)

Commerce (Schooner)

Eleonora (Ship)

Juno (Ship)

Sally (Schooner)

Union (Ship)

United States (Ship)

Added entries—key terms:

Account books

Accounts

Art

Artists

Navigation—Study and teaching

Seafaring

Acquisition

The Capt. Francis Rittal Papers were donated to the Maine Maritime Museum by Carrie L. Groves and Gladys E. Castner on August 21, 1976, accession no. 76.79.3 and 76.69.4

Provenance

The papers were donated to the Maine Maritime Museum along with other artifacts belonging to Capt. Francis Rittal from sisters Carrie L. (Reed) Groves and Gladys E. (Reed) Castner of Bangor, Maine, descendants of Captain Francis Rittal. The collection was handed down to them from their father William F. Reed. William F. Reed is a descendant of Charlotte Rittal Reed, sister of Capt. Francis Rittal.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on the use of these materials for study or research.

Physical Condition

The navigation book is in very good condition. The only real damage is to the leather spine and marble paper boards. The interior still maintains its brilliant pen and watercolor illustrations. Buffered acid-free tissue paper has been placed between all pages in the Navigation book. Additionally, the book boards are wrapped in acid free papers and placed in a 20 pt. archival folder stock enclosure.

The account book is covered in full suede and appears to may have gotten wet at some time in its early history due to tide marks and warped boards. A large number of pages were torn out the account book in the back (possibly by Capt. Rittal to be used to write vouchers and/or receipts. The torn pages have caused a weakening of the original binding forcing the signatures to pull away from the spine. The account book has been wrapped in acid free tissue paper and placed in a 20 pt. archival folder stock enclosure.

Biographical Notes

Captain Francis Rittal was born April 22, 1764 and was the fourth child of a family of six sisters and four brothers. His parents were Francis Rittal, Sr., (1724-1795) a tailor born in Ulm, Germany and Lucille (AKA Louise Wiullemine) Houdlette (1736-?) born in Neu Isenburg, Germany.[1] They lived on Dresden Neck in Desden, Maine. where they kept a tavern which, in later years was called "Granny Rittal's Tavern." In 1791, Rear-Admiral Bartholomew Jones made a trip up the Kennebec. In his journal, he writes about spending a night in a tavern. This is the very same tavern kept by Francis and Lucy Rittal. Jones writes a brief description of the family in his journal:

"who had a family of two sons and four daughters. Two of the latter were extremely handsome, and the civility of the whole house induced me to take up my quarters there for the night."[3]

Capt. Francis Rittal had six sisters—Mary (1757-1852), Sally (1762-1846), Lucy (1769/71-1865), Nancy (1773-?), Elizabeth or Betsy (1772-1821), Charlotte (1779-1857) and four brothers—James (1759-?), Martin (1776-1879), Louis (1769-1801) and John (1765-1800).[1,3]

He married Elizabeth Mayer on June 17, 1788 in Pownalborough, Maine. Francis and Betsey raised a family of five sons; James (1790-?), Francis, Jr., (1792-?), Charles (1797-?), Louis (1799-?), Philip (1807-?) and three daughters; Rose Ann (1803-?), Mary Ann (1805-?) and Sara (1812-?).[3]

From what we can determine from Francis' account book, he was master of the schooner *Sally* from June to October of 1794. Capt. Rittal next assumed command of the schooner *Rainbow* June of 1795 taking her from Kennebec River to Boston before voyaging to Liverpool and back to Boston in the fall of that same year. From September 1796 to May 1797, Capt. Francis Rittal commanded the 123-ton schooner *Camillus*.[2]

Capt. Rittal then took over the schooner *Commerce* and in February of 1798 left the Kennebec for the West Indies with cargo of lumber, fish, butter and red oak staves. He returned that same year in September with sugar, rum and coffee.

In 1800, Capt Rittal commanded the Bath built ship *Eleonora*. The *Eleonora* made stops at Norfolk, London, Barcelona, Villanova, Malaga, Falmouth, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Lisbon, and the Isle of Mayo before returning in 1802.[2]

There follows a five year gap between the last entry in May 1802 until late summer/early fall in 1807. It is interesting that Rittal's career began on the Kennebec River, where he lived, but later he sailed larger vessels belonging to Biel Wood or Wiscasset, on the nearby Sheepscot river. Capt. Rittal is now commandeering the ship *Union*. We see from entry records, he returned from Kingston Jamaica November 1807 and left for Greennock, Scotland from Charleston on December 25, 1807, three days after the United States Congress passed an embargo act prohibiting all foreign trade to British and French ports three days prior. Capt. Rittal stayed with the ship *Union* until 1810 when he took the ship *United States*.[2]

Account records show us that his eldest son James was aboard the ship *United States* as a (green) "hand," which was one step lower than a seaman. Capt. Rittal continued to make trips to British ports on the ship *United States* between 1810 and 1816 with a short break from sailing during 1812.[2]

The last entry in the account book records Capt. Rittal's voyage to the West Indies in 1819 aboard the schooner *Amanda Malvina*.[2]

Other vessels Capt. Francis Rittal was master of, but not mentioned in the account book, are the ship *Juno* and the schooner *Rover*

It has been noted that Capt. Francis Rittal died in 1819 or more specifically, October 7, 1819.[1]

References Cited:

1. Eastham, Wellfleet and beyond. http://capecodhistory.us/genealogy/family/f846.html
2. Lipfert, Nathan R. "The Rittal Collection." *Quarterboard*, Summer 1980.
3. Allen, Charles Edwin. History of Dresden, Maine. 1931.

Scope and Content Notes

There are two books in this collection: a navigation book and an account book. The Navigation book, dated Aug. 17, 1805, was created when Capt. Francis Rittal was 41 and had 5 to 6 children. He already had been a shipmaster for ten years. The book was created during a period when he was not commanding any vessels. Capt. Rittal filled 16 leaves of this blank-paged book with highly detailed geometrical and navigational problems illustrated in minute detail and finely painted in ink and watercolors. It was common for youngsters training to be sea officers to create navigation books like this to demonstrate their learning. In this case, Rittal may have created it as an example forhis sons. It is unheard of to fine one with this level of artistry. The navigation book is a excellent example of teaching through visual imagery—a method today called "visual literacy." It is truly a work of art. Some illustrations of interest inside the book were described in detail by Senior Curator, Nathan Lipfert ("The Rittal Collection," *Quarterboard*, Summer 1980):

> *"Two vessels are identified among the eight pictured in the navigation book; both are ships. One, No Pieces, is shown in a problem involving Seguin Island. However, no vessel by that name can be found in the records"*

This imaginary ship was created as part of the equation. In other words, it is not important as to the name or type of vessel, only that a vessel needs to be part of the equation. Mr. Lipfert continues:

> *"The other ship, Juno, York, is also hard to pin down; no ship named Juno seems to have been associated with town of York, Maine. A ship of that name was built in Pownalborough in 1794, although Rittal seems to have had no connection with it. Curiously enough, Rittal was master of a ship Juno, but not until 1809; the vessel had not been built in 1805 when the navigation book was made."*

The account book was Capt. Rittal's means of keeping for himself a record of disbursement accounts for the following vessels starting with:

Sally (Schooner)
Camillus (Schooner)
Commerce (Schooner)
Eleonora (Schooner)
Union (Ship)
Juno (Ship)
United States (Ship)
Amanda Malvina (Schooner)

You will also find entries for portage bills for the ship *Union*, *Juno* and the *United States*.

The British pound was the currency used when entering disbursement costs and payments in the account book (pounds, schillings, pence) up until February 1801 when Capt. Rittal started entering the currency as American dollars (dollars, cents, mills).

A large number of pages were torn out from the account book after Capt. Rittal's last entry. These pages may have been used to write out vouchers or receipts.

Processing Notes

Since there are only two books in the collection, processing was quite easy. The account book is placed before the Navigation book as it was created earlier (1794).

MS-243 Capt. Francis Rittal Papers
Container List

Box 1

Account Book (1794-1819). Disbursement accounts and receipts for vessels *Sally* (Schooner), *Rainbow* (Schooner), *Camillus* (Schooner), *Commerce* (Schooner), *Eleonora* (Schooner), *Union* (Schooner), *Juno* (Schooner), *United States* (Ship) and the *Amanda Malvina* (Schooner). Includes portage bills.

Navigation book (1805). 16 leaves of this blank-paged book with highly detailed mathematical, geometrical and navigational problems illustrated in minute detail and finely painted in ink and watercolors.